not just the two

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by transcryptidone

Summary

BLARGHMANGOS prompted: Duncan taking his kids (you pick the story) trick-or-treating and maybe get a little reward from their partner(s).

"Ouch!" shouts a little voice after leaning too far forward to pat a snuffling dog on the head. The reach was too far and too sudden and tugged against the hair already kept taut for ease of braiding. It's not the first time curiosity and youthful impulses have rewarded her with a tug against her scalp, but she whines as she complains, "Daddy!"

Duncan hums and pauses the way his fingers weave together her thick, curly hair. "Do you want me to stop?"

"Yes," Apricity says, nodding her head and pulling her hair from between Duncan's fingers without issue because he'd already relaxed his hold on the strands.

"Okay," he says and looks at the half of her hair that he'd already managed to braid. He's been tasked with doing many, many small braids rather than the two bigger ones that he usually does for her or the crown braid that's usually reserved for special occasions. Tonight would qualify as a special occasion, but tonight's look requires something else. He scoops his hand under the braids he'd managed to do as asks, "Should I undo these ones?"

"No," Apricity says with a shake of her head with two halves that move very differently -- one condensed with braids that knock against each other and the other side with curly hair that only seems to grow exponentially with each passing day.

"Alright," Duncan says even though his handiwork looks a mess. While he wanted to do a good job for her and her costume, it doesn't really matter that much. If she doesn't care, he doesn't care.

Rusty's ears perk up just a fraction of a second before he grunts as he pivots, which is quickly followed by a cascade of barking. Dogs come rushing from under blankets on the couch and bolt with nails scratching against the wood floors as if an alarm rings throughout the little cabin without any doorbell actually ringing.

"Wally's here!" Apricity yells as loud as she can manage as she rushes over to the couch just under the window and with the dogs by her side doing the same, she looks out to watch Molly and Wally climb out of their truck.

Though this house doesn't belong to Molly -- or Molly's in-laws for that matter -- she and Wally are free to walk in as they please and there's no need for Duncan to do things like meet them at the door, especially when the sound of wailing complaints echo from down the hallway. As he turns and follows the sound, he drags his fingers along the wall of a home he can call his and Will's alone.

On his birthday, he'd been given a great many presents. Will gave him a new sweatshirt and told him, *"This one I haven't stretched out."* They also gave him a letter that described him down to the core and then described each and every thing that they've loved about getting to know Duncan that deeply. He'd read it and held Will close with their baby in between them. That little baby decided that her birthday gift for him would be to push herself up on her elbows during tummy time and smile so *brightly* as she looked up at him. Then she grunted and frowned in a way that Will said looked just like him. When Molly called to wish him a happy birthday, he'd asked her to put him in touch with her in-laws. For his birthday, he took the money he'd been owed and as a gift to himself ensured his family would always have somewhere to call home.

There may come a day when they will want to sell this house, whether because they've become sick of Montana, Will decides to go to college after all, or they've just plain outgrown it. That time might be coming sooner rather than later. The smallness was cozy and safe when they moved here as just the two of them. Then when they had a newborn, it felt nice to roll out of bed and not have to worry about stairs, walls, or doorways. But extra rooms seem extra important when the adults are the only ones they want woken up by babies crying.

This time, the baby's cries quiet before Duncan has gotten far enough to reach them, which only means one thing. Will stands in front of the crib, bouncing and cooing at a baby that enjoys being held very, very much.

"I was getting them," Duncan remarks.

Will turns around, bouncing their whimpering baby all the while. Though the baby was born big and only has gotten bigger and bigger as they've grown, Will still holds the not-so-little one sat atop their belly like a shelf as if that's nature's intended design. Maybe it's only Will that can make it seem that way. Though this time around has been particularly draining, it's Will's perseverance that Duncan has always admired. Their stubbornness he could do with less of.

"You were on costume duty," Will counters, twisting and swaying even though they hardly seem like they should have the energy for it. Their hair is mussed and flattened on one side from where they were just napping -- or trying to. They seem to be exhausted all day every

day and Duncan knows it's gotten to the point where, to Will, naps feel like a waste of time, especially when they can just have woken up from one and the bags under their eyes still want to welcome the sandman back again.

"I was going to put them in their costume," Duncan states, taking a few steps and holding his arms out as he raises just one brow. "After I got them."

Will scoffs, but also smiles, then groans quietly as they shift their hold on the baby to be able to lift them up again. They keep the smile throughout the hand off and then rest their hand on the top of their belly on the ledge the little one left behind unoccupied. "Looking at you, no one would know you're such a baby hog."

Duncan hums and states, "Looking at you, they would."

Will laughs, big and loud, bracing their hands against their back and their belly protruding a bit further with just how good of a belly laugh it is. They've gotten bigger and bigger each time around, but even so the size of their belly now might not have so much to do with it being the third time around.

Will makes an *oof* sort of noise as Apricity darts into the room and slams against their side. She hugs her arms around as much of Will's belly as she can and fitfully rubs her face against the curve -- probably a bit too rough. Duncan can't quite see the pout but he can hear it in her tone as she bemoans, "My hair looks silly."

"If you say so," Will says with a few fading chuckles. They scratch their nails in the hair Duncan hadn't gotten the chance to braid yet. "What do you think should be done about it?"

"Daddy," Apricity mumbles. "Will you?"

"Will you *what?"* Will urges as they tuck her hair behind her ear so Duncan might actually see her face and hear her without a muffled mumble.

"Will you braid my hair?" she asks, blinking up at him and still pouting in that puppy dog way Will can do when they feel like it. *"Please."*

"I need to dress Juniper," Duncan answers as he shifts Juniper in his arms. When Apricity groans and rubs her face against Will's belly a bit more, Duncan suggests, "If you want it to go by faster, you could help me."

Apricity perks up at that. She's so excited she's up on her tippy-toes as she says, "I'll help."

"Good luck with that," Will teases as they pat Apricity on the head one more time and then a couple times against her shoulder in a quiet request that she might consider letting go. "I'm going to work on getting myself dressed."

"Will--" Duncan starts, though they've had this conversation already. He's still not so sure it seems like the greatest idea for Will to come along. Though there have been no doctor's orders or anything of the like, Duncan sometimes wishes he could give Will a reason to slow down they will *listen to.*

“Zazzy!” Apricity interrupts, grabbing onto Will harder instead of letting go. “Wait! I’ll help!”

“You’re helping Daddy,” Will reminds her, with only enough teasing in their voice for Duncan to really notice -- even if Apricity shows more and more signs that she might grow up to be as intuitive as Will is.

But for now, she’s just a kid. The simple fact that she knows there’s a world that exists outside of herself can feel like an accomplishment. It’s Apricity’s flair for fun that her parents cherish. The seriousness that cemented itself in Will and Duncan’s lives early on feels like something to be administered very carefully.

And so, when she just looks at him in a way that is either sly or shy, Duncan just says, “So long as you’re helping someone.”

“Well, then come on, you,” Will says, reluctance possibly exaggerated, though possibly not.

As Apricity grabs Will’s hand and pulls them away, Will pointedly directed towards Duncan mouths *spoiled.* But he knows they like it. They’ll make fun of Duncan for his doting at every opportunity but that’s how the two of them ended up having another baby and soon thereafter making more. They waited between Apricity and Juniper, one had been an accident and the other very much intentional. But this time it’s maybe a bit of both. Nothing encouraged and nothing prevented. The exhaustion of taking care of *two kids* added its own limitations to how many opportunities they had. But then Molly took a turn looking after the kids...

Juniper slaps a hand soaked with drool against his cheek and it spurs him to carry on and grab everything he’ll need to change Juniper and get their costume on. Molly made it for them based on a conversation she and Will had one day at work. Both Will and Molly could have their reasons to work less, but maybe because of that they both sit behind that counter together every day. Will came home from one of those days with a costume clearly made on a home sewing machine and all the better for it. As Duncan fastens the snaps, he’s glad it will be easy to undo when they need to change the baby again while they’re out. The stuffing in the costume might get squished when Juniper is in the carrier, but it will still fit.

Duncan also has to get dressed himself, which luckily is the easiest part. As he dons a shirt he’s worn many times before, Juniper does their best to play with a snuffling, skeptical Rusty, all the while squealing little shouts of *da!* and Duncan chuckles as Rusty lets one of his ears get caught in little fingers. The good boy only grumbles a little as he tugs his ear away when Juniper gets too rough. He has his own costume that Molly made too. With two extra stuffed dog heads that resemble the little tan bulldog remarkably well affixed to a collar, he makes a very cute, very small guardian for the gates of the Underworld.

“Daddy?” Apricity interjects as he’s pulling the shirt over his head. “Are you done?”

“Just about,” Duncan says as he pulls the shirt down. It’s one of many, though this one was made rather than found by happenstance. Will and Apricity gave it to him more as a gift to themselves and they designed it to emblazon him with the title: *Dadicorn.* He looks at the bin

in her hand that holds all of the odds and ends for her hair and asks, “Do you have a little more helping in you?”

Apricity shrugs as she holds out the plastic bin for him to take. “Maybe.”

Duncan takes what he’s given and sets it on the bed far, far away from Juniper who might be tempted to put one of many things into their mouth that they shouldn’t. He looks between the baby who already has a spit-soaked fist in their mouth and his little girl in her dress for her costume and asks, “Will you play with Juniper while I finish your braids?”

“I suppose so,” Apricity says as she nods her head and climbs onto the bed. The stretch of the fabric for her dress allows the climb easily and causes no problem when she sits cross-legged, even if some of the drapes got caught on her knees. She sits across from Juniper, who points at her and *squeals.*

“Okay,” Duncan says and settles in behind her, trying to sort out what mess she’s managed to make of her hair since he left it alone.

He has to use the end of a comb to separate out the strands of hair to carry on making small little braids. As he goes along, he keeps the comb between his teeth as he reaches for a little barrette with a plastic snake head hot glued to it and affixes clips it to the end of the braid just above the hair tie. One after another, after another, each braid gets a little snake head on the end until all of her hair has been woven into little braids to create their best replica of a bundle of snakes on her head.

Apricity looks at herself in the mirror for all of one second before *bolting* to the other room to show Wally most likely. Duncan follows much more slowly, having the baby to worry about as they seem nearly knocked over by the breeze Apricity left in her wake. As Juniper either lets themself fall back or throws themself back, they giggle, which in turn makes Duncan chuckle. It's the domestic domino effect, he supposes as he scoops up the baby and grabs the carrier on the way to the door where everyone already seems to be gathered.

Wally’s costume and Apricity’s compliment each other -- as well as Rusty’s. In a fake armor with a chest plate and a fake sword, Wally watches Apricity shake her head to make the braids with the snake’ heads clack against each other. Molly watches too and laughs as Wally pretends to turn to stone and collapse dramatically against the arm of the couch by the door. She’s dressed in a Greek goddess costume that’s a little half-assed, but Duncan wouldn’t expect much different after having made so many others.

“Ready?” Duncan asks Will, watching how they shift on their feet.

“As I’ll ever be,” Will says as they fasten the last button in a line that dots itself from the hem of their dark blue jean dress up to the base of their throat. The buttons are a stark white and bright contrast against the blue and the bright red of the belt that’s made to look fastened across their belly and the red hat perched on their head.

“You look great,” Duncan says, admiring how the way that Will’s hair is styled and held back makes their cheeks look particularly round and the red hat brings out any blush that still blooms across their cheeks.

“So do you,” they say and then furrow their brow and rest their fist against the arch of their lower back as they ask, “But, Little Miss Priss, where is Daddy’s unicorn horn?”

Apricity does another zip across the house to find a headband with a unicorn horn, ears, and a tuft of a mane. “Borrowed,” Apricity reminds him when she holds it out for him to take. “You have to give it back.”

“I know,” he says, kneeling so that she can place the headband on like she’s bestowing him with a crown. That crown isn’t exactly made for adults to wear, so it digs in behind his ear in a way that isn’t yet painful but he already knows will be. But he’ll wear it until then or until Juniper snatches it off.

“Time to head out?” Molly asks as she places her hand on Wally’s shoulder to let him know that his dramatization has run its course -- though there’s a bit more song and dance left in actually getting everyone in the car.

The car itself was another purchase made as soon as they had the means to. As much as they’d grown attached to their truck through the time when it was one half of a second home to them, the momentum of their future required something that could last long and transport their whole family. As he drives their winding driveway and watches the sunset emerge from between the trees, there’s no rumble roaring or worries about what might have become rickety. When he looks to his right and Will is staring out at the same sunset with the orange, pink, and magenta as a background to their beauty, Duncan knows that the car itself isn’t what matters.

Will places their hand on the top of their belly and it’s deja vu Duncan is feeling. There’s familiarity, surreality, and a bit of disbelief. He doesn’t feel this feeling every day, just often enough to remind him just how far they’ve come from anything Duncan ever expected. They’d been just a pair of down-on-their-luck teens with a baby on the way that they had no idea how to take care of; now they have two and more on the way. There was a time when loneliness was a given; now it nearly never happens. He’d been alone in the world; now he has *family* and more and more of it. Every expectation that’s been exceeded, he would attribute it all to Will.

Duncan parks their car in a neighborhood he’s driven by every day but only actually been to a few times. Once was another time with Molly when she was thinking about moving to a neighborhood after Walter died and she needed a distraction and occasional frivolous company. Will knew she’d never move but they’d toured houses with her anyhow so they could be there when she cried at the sight of an empty closet in an empty bedroom of a brand new home devoid of the comfort of fond memories.

“How long do you think Will can last?” Molly asks as they watch Apricity pull Will along to the front door of the first house for the night. Molly crosses her arms as Will uses their free hand to rub their back. Duncan can’t tell from here if they remembered to put the belly brace on. It’s a new purchase that’s much needed but often forgotten. Duncan wishes he’d thought to remind them.

“Can?” he says as he shifts his feet and adjusts the shoulder strap on the baby carrier. Juniper is content to watch from the sidelines; they don’t really know the difference. “Will does

whatever they put their mind to."

"Even twins can't slow them down," Molly says with a scoff and a smile that makes it clear that she's impressed.

"Molly!" calls out a woman from the other side of the cul-de-sac. The woman waves to a child -- her child, presumably -- and then points before she turns and crosses the street. She smiles big and bright with the kind of hair and make-up that Duncan sees enough to assume is in style. She doesn't hug Molly so they must not be *that* close, but Duncan can't be sure because he's not *that close* with anyone outside his household but maybe Molly. "It's nice to see you!" the woman says and she seems like she means it, so Duncan thinks maybe he's wrong until she continues on to ask, "Do you live around here?"

"No, but there's no neighborhood anywhere nearby us," Molly says with a sigh and a frustrated brush of her hair across her bangs. Her next huff brushes just the ends.

The surprise the woman shows at the concept makes Duncan hope Will doesn't suggest they move to suburbia. There's nothing he likes less than frivolous company. Luckily, Will isn't any more fond of it than he is. The only sticking point might be if Will and Duncan start to wonder too much or too often if their kids ought to have a neighborhood to run around in instead of just trees, woods, and more trees.

"Are we the closest?" the woman asks.

"Not to me," Molly answers, shaking her head and gesturing towards him as she continues, "But to Duncan's."

"Duncan Vizla," he says, holding out his hand because it's probably about the time when he's supposed to. It's something he's had to learn the awkward way in the meetings and *networking* he took over for Walter.

"Margaret Miller." she says as she shakes his hand with fingers that are already ice cold in the chilly autumn air. "Wally and Johnny go to school together."

Duncan hums, nods, feels out of place, and dreads the day when sleepover pick-up small talk becomes a regular occurrence.

"Duncan's partner works for me at the store," Molly says, nodding her head towards where Will, Apricity, Wally, and Rusty make their way back from the first bout of houses. When Rusty pees on a bush along the way, Duncan isn't sure if someone will get mad about that. Molly pats his arm as she adds, "And Duncan took over Walter's business after he passed."

The silence that settles in isn't one that makes Duncan uncomfortable. Though he knows the quiet comes from grief, anything he might say would seem less poignant, less respectful than simply letting that quiet be what it is. Molly gave him a listening ear during the moments when he needed it most; returning the favor is the least he could do.

But Margaret can only tolerate the silence and the pause for so long. Instead, as so many do, she uses the baby as a convenient distraction. Smiling at Juniper, she coos, "What a cute little

blueberry."

"Juni isn't a blueberry," Apricity interrupts as she barrels in with her pumpkin-shaped bucket rattling with the bounce of a few pieces of candy. She grabs one of Juniper's hands that extend out from the carrier and the plush purple costume they're wearing and she announces, "They're a Perry Berry!"

"You're right," Margaret says with a hand exaggeratedly draped over her heart and a dip of her head. "Please excuse me."

"Zazzy is the blueberry!" Apricity carries on while Will is still approaching at a much more leisurely pace. They have their hand underneath their belly to help offset the weight, but Duncan knows from experience that's not nearly enough. But Apricity doesn't notice these sorts of things, she's only concerned with announcing, "From the movie!"

"Very clever," Margaret says with a nod of her head to knowledge Will in a grown-up sort of way.

Will sighs as they remark, "Felt appropriate."

Molly and Margaret both laugh and even Duncan feels his lips tilting towards a smile at the sarcasm in Will's tone. Although it's a frequent complaint Will has, they continue to be very charming even as they pout and grumble. Pregnancy has softened their cheeks and dulled the edges of their cheekbones and the shape of their belly is nothing short of adorable.

As Molly takes the next turn accompanying the kids to ring another doorbell, Duncan wraps his arm around Will's shoulders and kneads his fingers where he finds a knot between the base of their neck and their shoulder. He pinches that knot between his fingers and thumb and applies enough pressure to hurt and soothe -- just how Will likes.

"You okay?" he asks as Will tips their head with a sigh.

"Yeah," Will replies even as the roll of their shoulder makes something pop.

"You should go home," Duncan states as Juniper babbles and tugs at Will's costume.

"I don't know," they say, turning around and bending slightly to give the baby a few kisses in quick succession to their soft, round cheek. They hum and grimace as they stand up straight again -- or as straight as they can manage. Will's fingers follow the length of Juniper's hair from the root down to the swoop against their forehead as they remark, "We all drove together."

"Molly knows people here," Duncan reminds them.

"She knows people everywhere in this middle of nowhere," Will grumbles, scrunching their nose as they complain in an endearing sort of way. Their eyes look from Juniper to Apricity as she holds out her bright orange pumpkin for another treat. "I'd have to leave the car seats."

"So leave them," Duncan says. It's a hassle, but not impossible. Everything that makes a car seat safe also makes them annoying to have to take all the way out and put back in. But it can

be done.

“I can make it," Will says with a smile as they watch Apricity run the length of a house’s walkway and down the sidewalk towards them, her braids whipping and bouncing as she runs like they might actually be a bunch of snakes.

“Will--”

“Zazzy!” Apricity shouts loud enough for other parents to turn and look at her and then look at her parents. “Look!”

Will just keeps on smiling and, when she’s close enough, only asks her, “What did you get, Miss Priss?”

The candy bar she holds up isn’t one of the little ones that come in the variety bags Molly has had at the store for the past month and that Duncan keeps finding the wrappers for balled up under the pillows when Will satisfies cravings in bed. No, this candy bar is much bigger than that and makes Duncan wonder if it’s plain generosity or a display of wealth. But what neighborhood competition is won based on the candy given out on Halloween? It’s just supposed to be a simple thing for kids -- or so he’s been told. He doesn’t think he ever went trick-or-treating as a kid, but it’s possible he just doesn’t remember it.

“That’s pretty impressive,” Will says as they’re handed the full size chocolate bar Apricity has been given. They set the bar on top of their belly and then catch it when it teeters and falls. Instead they pin the candy bar to the side of their belly under a flat palm as they instruct Apricity, “You know, this candy bar is about as big as these babies are.”

Apricity blinks up at Duncan with big, wide eyes as she asks, “Is that true?”

“I think so,” he says. He never has really understood the month-by-month fruit comparisons, but looking at the candy bar and looking at Will’s belly, it seems about right.

Will uses their other hand to dig into the pocket of their costume and uncurls their fist to reveal just a singular, silver-wrapped chocolate kiss and drop it into Apricity's hands. “Wasn’t all that long ago that they were barely bigger than this.”

Apricity holds the little piece of chocolate cupped in her hands, blinking her big, blue eyes between her two parents and the chocolate and back again.

Duncan lowers himself to kneel with one knee against the cold sidewalk, placing a steadying hand against where the carrier cradles Juniper’s back. Once he and Juniper are steadied, he places his hand under Apricity’s and tells her, “You were that small once too.”

Duncan watches her mind *reeling.* There are gears turning and a little, curious mind whirs as she considers something that Duncan still has difficulty wrapping his head around from time to time. Sometimes, as he looks at Apricity and Juniper, he remembers what each of them was like when they were still growing in the womb. Since they've been born and been growing into their own people, Apricity has been their warmth in the winter and Juniper has been their reminder that hope can survive year round.

“What do you think about that?” Will asks as they touch their hand to the back of her head.

“Wow,” she gasps in wonder.

Will laughs and agrees, “It is pretty *wow.”*

“Turning this little kiss into this big bar is pretty hard work,” Duncan tells her while her brain is still connecting the dots.

Apricity nods and closes her hand around the chocolate kiss as she says, “Makes Zazzy sleepy.”

“That’s right,” Duncan says, thinking of how her hop, skip, and jump across connecting dots reminds him of Will. “Zazzy has *two* to make, which means twice the work.”

Apricity looks at Will with even more awe and Duncan understands how she feels.

“Miss Priss,” Will says softly, “Would it be okay with you if I go home?”

Apricity furrows her brow, frowns, and clutches the chocolate in her hand hard enough to make Duncan wonder if it won’t crumble or melt. “I don’t want to go home.”

“You can stay,” Will clarifies. “Daddy will stay with you. And Molly and Wally.”

“And Juni?” she asks, looking at her baby sibling and patting them on the head.

“And Juni,” Duncan assures her, catching her hand before she makes the baby cry in complaint, which might then turn to wailing. He’ll already have to distract Juniper as Will leaves so that Juniper doesn’t get too upset and discourage them.

“Okay,” Apricity says, watching Will put her prized full-size candy bar back in her bucket. She's still quiet and in her own thoughts until Wally calls out *Sissy!* and then she’s off again on another adventure to see what candy treasure trove awaits her.

“Okay,” Will says with a sigh, rubbing their belly from top to bottom and pressing against a particular part by their ribs while they frown. Duncan digs in his pocket for the car keys and though Will has conceded enough to hold out their hand without comment, they only actually take the keys while they still assert, “Call me to pick you up.”

“Fine,” Duncan says even though depending on how long they stay, Will could get home and then need to come back out again within the hour. But little victories...

When Will says their goodbyes to Molly and Wally, Molly gives Duncan a certain *look* -- not quite like *told you so*, but not all that dissimilar either -- it makes him think maybe they should have made a bet. Though if they had, Duncan would have probably been escorting the kids to and from houses for the rest of the night. There are only so many times he can hear the question *"well, what are you dressed up as?*" or experience the same joke about turning to stone.

He walks with Apricity and Wally up to a house and gives Rusty a little tug when he sniffs a lawn that still manages to be a vibrant shade of green. Not only would Duncan imagine that whoever has such a lawn cares a lot about it and would prefer it not be damaged by dog pee, but he's pretty sure Rusty doesn't even have any pee left in him at this point. But even as Rusty concedes easily and the kids even stay along the path without straying onto the grass, Duncan still feels he's not meant to be here.

Apricity rings the doorbell with ease that she comes by quickly. She's already holding up her pumpkin before the door is even fully open and there's a big, bright smile to greet her. The blonde woman at the door bears a bowl of seemingly homemade goodies -- caramel apple slices, marshmallow ghosts, and green-tinged popcorn. She kneels down just inside her doorway and holds out the bowl for Apricity to choose from. While Apricity makes her selection, the woman looks over her shoulder, creating a cascade of perfect blonde hair as she glances towards an equally coiffed husband.

Duncan doesn't like it.

At first, he doesn't know why. He places a hand on Juniper's back, rounded out a bit in the carrier as they've fallen asleep and slumped down. When they walk back down the sidewalk, his hand hovers close to Apricity, fingers and arm flexing with the urge to scoop her up and carry her on his hip. She suddenly seems hardly bigger than the chocolate kiss and just as easily lost.

Some sort of shroud falls that has nothing to do with the setting sun and the shadows in between the lamplight. The decorations in this neighborhood are more cutesy than scary, but Duncan finds them haunting. They have nothing of the sort at home, he'd never even thought to. He can hardly imagine what these houses would look like in time for Christmas. When that makes his hackles raise further, he still doesn't know what the reason is.

It's not until Duncan's mind is afforded the opportunity to drift on the way home that he can really give it any consideration. All is quiet as Juniper sleeps and even Apricity has drifted off while doing an inventory of her candy. He shifts in his seat to check on her but doesn't know what he needed to check until he's facing towards the front again. The last time he thought of the cause was during the dark of night like this. It's possible the reason why it's so hard to pin down is because he can only remember the details as they've been described. Though he's heard many times about the picture perfect couple in the picture perfect neighborhood that makes deals behind closed doors, he never saw them for himself.

He mulls it all over as he carries his kids inside one at a time and tucks them into their respective beds. After checking the doors are locked and the windows are closed, he's the last one to turn in for the night. With his unicorn shirt in the laundry pile with his jeans and replaced with pajama pants, he climbs into bed next to Will, who has changed out of their costume too and into a black t-shirt dress that's baggy everywhere but around their belly.

Duncan lies on his back and murmurs towards the ceiling, "I don't want to move to a neighborhood."

Will doesn't turn off the lamp by their side yet, so their furrowed brow is there for Duncan to catch sight of as they remark, "Okay?"

“I was thinking about the couple,” he carries on, letting his eyes slip closed as he whispers too quiet for little, sleeping ears to hear, “The one your dad was going to sell Apricity to.”

Will sighs -- and grunts a bit -- as they turn over in bed to lie on their side facing him. They rub their fingers against their eyes and then up across their forehead to yank back their hair in an exasperated sort of way. “I had another nightmare about them the other night,” they say. “Did I tell you this already?”

“You told me,” he replies. “I think that’s what made me think of it.”

Will usually needs to talk about those nightmares when they happen. It’s not too often, but at certain times of the year -- their dad’s birthday, the anniversary of the day they ran away, the day they *had to run away* -- the nightmares are more frequent. Then there are random times, like when Apricity reads a book or sees something on TV or hears something at the store and asks why she doesn’t have grandparents. Will wakes up in the morning soaked with sweat and wrung out from nightmares wherein their heart is broken -- that couple claims they own Apricity or they try to buy Juniper and, more recently, the twins too -- and then Will finally gets their imaginary opportunity to shout what they’ve wanted to say ever since.

“I’m sorry to make you remember it,” they say, pulling back their hair a little further and gripping their fingers a bit tighter. “Especially when I wish I could forget.”

Duncan reaches up and touches Will’s hand. When they realize themself and flinch away, he takes that hand as soon as the curls have finished slipping free of their fingers. Will has slipped off their rings, especially as their fingers have swollen enough to make those rings just a bit too tight. But even if they might be a bit swollen or have a scar or two from shoveling, fishing, hunting, or one of many other things Will does, Duncan knows these hands very well. From their first cigarette together, the first time Will climbed in through his window, when they held hands in his bed, when they passed notes in class, and then when Will dug in their purse and dropped a bomb in his palm in the form of a positive pregnancy test...

“It’s not just the two of us anymore,” he says and then falters when he can’t quite find the words he’s looking for.

“But out here in the woods,” Will continues for him, as they wriggle and maneuver to snuggle up to his side. “It still feels like the place where we can just be ourselves.”

Duncan hums and nods. Exactly. He remembers Will lying on their back in the grass where the sunlight snuck in through the leaves and he remembers being beckoned over to lie down on his side and cuddle in close. Between the two of them, there has long been an ease in the give and take.

“You’ve always been where my happiness comes from,” Duncan says as he shifts himself down lower so they can align just right in another way. Instead of Will’s cheek on his shoulder, he looks them in the eyes and shows Will the deepest truth of it. His hand touches the round shape of Will’s belly as he murmurs, “You just keep giving me more and more of it.”

Will kept him company when he was listlessly lonely. They chose him and their baby above all else. And then that baby brought her own joy in new ways all the time. Smiling, crawling, talking, walking, making little clever comments and saying things she doesn't even realize are funny, Apricity is her own wonderful person and then there were two in Duncan's life. Two became three with Juniper. He'll be up to five in just a few more months. He'll never be alone again, always surrounded by little joys.

"Sorry I didn't dress up for you," Will whispers, nearly close enough to press the words against his lips. "I thought about it."

"What did you consider?" Duncan asks as his hands roam.

"Pregnant nun, pregnant priest, maybe a succubus," Will says with a smirk. "Or a siren, but turns out they're only sexy if you have a thing for bird ladies."

Duncan hums and bunches some of the soft, stretchy fabric of their dress in his fist. "You didn't have to do anything."

Will laughs with a teasing edge that bleeds into their lilt as they instruct, "Close your eyes."

Duncan does as he's told and lets his eyes slip closed, memorizing where their twins grow from touch alone. He knows underneath the thin fabric are little indents, stretch marks that commemorate how Will's body has grown and toiled to bring their babies into the world. Some are purple, some are red, some have faded enough to become barely silvery.

"Imagine I dressed up for you," Will whispers in his ear with all of the seduction and temptation of a siren without the feathers or whatever.

Will knows exactly what to say and what to do to have Duncan agreeing without question: "Okay."

Will hums and rests their hand on top of Duncan's where he still grips and twists the fabric of their dress. "What am I wearing?"

"Nothing," Duncan says with a groan. There's nothing better than getting to see everything, all of Will without anything covered up or hidden away. He wants to see those little stretch marks for himself and kiss each one so that they know he's grateful.

"Now, now," Will chides softly with a couple clicks of their tongue. "Not too soon."

Duncan groans and furrows his brow and tries to think of clothes to put on his mental image. Nothing else seems to really compare. He considers the nun and the priest, some elaborate costume or outfit with a salacious fantasy that gets its encouragement and it's backdrop from the chilly Halloween night and the wind that roars outside the window. But it's the sunlight he still remembers most.

"You're wearing your old clothes," he says, thinking of the white cotton shirt and blue jean overalls that Will wore when they were pregnant with Apricity. That outfit was something simple, something different from the clothes they usually wore to school, something special,

something that made it clear as daylight that Will was growing their baby. He thinks of Will wearing that now and murmurs, “They don’t fit.”

Will’s hum turns to a groan and the mattress dips as they push themself up. Duncan’s hands instinctively follow but he knows better than to open his eyes. When Will sits astride his hips, the sudden weight pressing down on him has a gust of air rushing out of him with a groan. Will’s chuckle is quiet as they lean forward and press their tight, round belly against his.

“My body reflects everything you’ve done to me,” they whisper so quietly he has to strain to hear and as they keep leaning forward, Duncan holds his breath in his chest to give their belly more space as his middle has much more room to give.

Duncan’s cock throbs as his hands wander across the expanse of Will’s womb, until his fingers bump against a hem he can peel back. As skin touches skin, he feels the warmth and the tension held in carrying his brood. His legs shift rather uselessly, wanting so badly to buck his hips to gain some friction against his cock. But he lets himself be pinned.

“Not once. Not twice,” Will says with a sigh as their belly presses against him still and it’s enough to make him think about the way that that belly *hangs.* Bent over with knees spread, that belly can be seen pulling down on Will’s back hard enough and far enough to nearly touch the floor. “Three times, you’ve done this to me. And this time you wouldn’t settle for just the one.”

Those little overalls would never be able to contain how far that belly has grown. The thin white t-shirt would be bunched up by their chest, having snapped there when stretched so far there was no more stretch to give. Trying to pretend those clothes could fit when they so clearly could not might almost make it more obscene. Now naïve it might seem to think such a body could ever be contained, bursting seams as Duncan’s babies call the shots.

Will knows how to strike while the iron’s hot and how to shape metal as soft as putty in their hands. “I’m just your breeder,” they say, voice breathy like the sweetest suffering. “Kept and bred as you like.”

Duncan groans and spreads his fingers wide to press against a tight swell that still won’t give. Those fingers twitch and flex as do the muscles in his arms as he longs to wrap them around Will and throw them to the bed. He wants to pin their hands to the mattress and mount them from behind so that belly can hang and sway, spreading Will’s knees so far and so wide he might feel the underside of that belly pressed against the front of his thighs.

“You better lie down,” Duncan says and Will chuckles once more as they climb off his hips, dragging their ass against his cock as they go, of course.

The lamp clicks just before Duncan opens his eyes, but having them closed for so long makes the moonlight seem bright. Will shuffles under the covers and pulls them up to their shoulders and Duncan slips under the blankets too to press himself along their back. He rucks up their dress and peels away their cotton panties, pressing his fingers against the damp and then the slick wet that made it so.

“When will it end?” Will whispers into the dark, nearly muffled entirely by the pillow under their cheek. When he presses a finger in, their voice falters and stutters with something like a whimper or a whine, “When will you stop doing this to me?”

“Never,” Duncan grunts in their ear and then lets his lips hover just above their skin to feel how goosebumps rise in the wake.

“You’d like to keep me tied up,” Will says with a gasping moan when he adds a second finger and strokes slow and sure so that they’ll feel every bit. He strokes his fingers in and out and lingers on the spot that is sure to make Will’s breath stutter. They arch their neck to his lips and murmur, “Just a bed-bound, knocked-up pillow princess.”

“Will,” he moans as his slick fingers pull away to yank his pajama pants down enough for his cock to spring free. He digs his teeth into Will’s neck to keep from groaning too loudly as he sinks his cock into where they’re so warm and wet. Will uses the pillow to cover their mouth as they moan, but he can still hear them. He can feel the vibrations with each sound that they make and each tremble of their muscles.

They’re right. He would tie them up in ropes that are just as sturdy and pretty as Will is. He’d tuck flowers into the rope that would bracket their belly and leave them tied up long enough to leave imprints in their skin like the flowers Will has pressed between book pages. He’d hand feed them, rub lotion across the great expanse of their belly, touch and kiss until their heads spin. He’d breed them although they’re already bred and promise them more.

“I love you,” he rasps into their hair as he rolls his hips. “I love you, I love you.”

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